



Gibson, Steve, Stefan Arisona, Donna Leishman, Atau Tanaka (2022)
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Introduction

This chapter looks at contemporary examples of immersive environments in interactive media art that explore Live Visuals practices. Concentrating on the works of established artists such as Jeffrey Shaw, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Luc Courchesne, Char Davies, Don Ritter, and newcomers such as Alan Kwan and Shezad Dawood, as well as the author's own practice, this chapter illustrates some conceptual, narrative and formal models for the use of live audio-visuals in a transmedia installation context.

Immersion in Experience: Don Ritter's *Vested*

Canadian artist Don Ritter's work *Vested* presents a different notion of immersion in a live audio-visual artwork: one in which the participant is immersed in the physical experience of a traumatic and violent event. While *Vested* does rely on large multi-screen projection, its sense of physical immersion is quite different from the panorama's of Courchesne, or the full head-body immersion of Davies' *Osmose*: "Vested ranks among those artworks that attract recipients' attention by means of spectacular events – which ensue in any case from the latter's own actions – and induce them simultaneously to turn their attention to themselves. It is the recipients' actions, the decisions they take, that comprise the real arena in which work is done; and it is here that the sense of the work is defined."⁴² While Courchesne's *You Are Here* presents a quasi-realist, almost documentary immersion in real locales, and Davis' *Osmose* represents a magic-realist immersion within fantastic landscapes, *Vested* immerses users in an emotional experience in which their interactive choices have moral consequences: in which they play the role of a possible terrorist/freedom fighter, with the ability to blow up buildings and structures, albeit virtually.

In *Vested* "Visitors to the installation encounter a military vest hanging on a stand and a 14m (45ft) video projection of slow moving clouds. An assistant invites visitors to wear the vest. When the vested person walks in front of the projection, a panorama of international buildings appears. By continuing to walk in front of the projection, the person can navigate through panoramas of well-known art museums, political buildings, ancient buildings, towers, and temples.... If the vested person presses the red button on the vest, the building panorama is overlaid with large explosions accompanied with sound."⁴³



Figure 10 – Don Ritter, *Vested*, 2010. *Code Live*, Winter Olympics Cultural Olympiad, Vancouver, Canada. 2010

As shown in Figure 10 and in the video documentation,⁴⁴ the user is dwarfed by the projection system, but at the same time they are obviously the central figure, due to the lights tracking them and the ominous “bomb jacket” interface that they use to trigger the virtual explosions on screen. The image of the user is also super-imposed onto the video at given moments, further inserting them into the scene. While the piece can be viewed as an entertaining game-like environment, in which audience is given a chance to surreptitiously blow up famous buildings, the intimidating presence of the bomb interface, as well as its experience in the very public venue of the Winter Olympics, renders the in-person moral choices made more visceral than they would be if this a traditional game played at home. While the live visual elements are basic, mostly consisting of still images of famous buildings, with occasional videos of explosions, they are obviously very responsive to the moral choices of the users, as reflected by their willingness to press the red button in front of a potential audience.

The immersion here is less about the physical effect of immersion (although there certainly is a physical sense of immersion), but is more about the potential for immersive interactive technology to allow us to offer up choices with implied moral consequences. In a very real way this is psychological immersion, an approach that has been followed up by a number of interactive media artists such as Alan Kwan, but also in commercial VR projects which attempt to use headset immersion to simulate psychological or traumatic experiences, including examples such as *Transference* by Ubisoft.⁴⁵